



# WORKPLACE STRESS AND COPING STRATEGIES IN THE TEACHING PROFESSION

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## ABSTRACT

It is believed by many people that teaching is an easy task. But now a days, it has become a challenging profession which needs active participation of teacher throughout the teaching learning process. Even in schools teacher are required to perform many nonacademic work along with academic responsibilities. The workload, high stake job demands and even bad behavior of staff, students and parents may work as stressors for teachers in teaching profession. Long lasting stress leads to the adverse effects on teachers' health and performance which in turn leads to the poor education system. For enhancing education system teachers need to be stress free and they should know how to cope from stress situations.

**KEY WORDS:** Workplace stress, coping strategies, teaching profession.

## INTRODUCTION:

"The only person without stress is a dead person".

*-Hans Selye*

In our daily life, we face many challenges. These challenges can create an environment for the individual that may develop the feeling of anxiety, tension, tiredness, elation, depression, anger or worry. This may lead the person to the state of 'Stress'. Stress can be defined as our body's response to the physical and emotional changes occurred in our life. When the individual is under excessive pressure and other type of demand is placed on him/her, then he/she may feel hopeless and supposed that they can't cope with it. The impact of this undue pressure can easily visible through various physical and behavioral responses. Everyone in the world is different from other. In the same way, their way to perceive the environment and situation and how we react and response for the same is also different. Thus, a same situation may cause anxiety and tension in one person and to the other may be worked as the motivator, stimulator and source of encouragement. Thus, most of the stress is generated the person itself on the basis of how they perceive themselves.

The stress is based on individual's perception of the situation. So, the stress can be Eustress (good stress) or Distress (bad stress). It will be good when it leads to the motivation, excitement and improves individual's performance. As, this positive stress energizes the person into motion, enhance the concentration and performance. But, Stress can be bad when it develops anxiety and lead to the mental and physical problems. This stress could be short term and long term. It develops the physical, mental and behavioral problems, reduces the motivation in the person.

Stress can be of two types: Acute (short term) stress and Chronic (long term) stress. Acute stress is a short term stress that generally develop due to immediate perceived threat. They are normally mild stressors that occur due to immediate need of situation to act upon. The individual can manage this stress as it occurs for short time and it is over after that time. As it last for short duration of time, it generally doesn't leave chronic effects on the health of the person. On the other hand, when the stress last for a long time it starts producing adverse effects on person's physical and emotional health. This stress is known as chronic stress. Many a times, the person who is suffering from this stress is become use to of taking and stress and even didn't realize that he/she is suffering from chronic stress.

The response to the stress may vary from person to person. The way individual respond to the stressful situation is largely dependent on his/her personality. Therefore, symptoms of stress may vary. Symptoms of stress can be physical, mental, behavioral and emotional. Physical symptoms of stress may include headache, pains in various parts of body, problems related to the digestion system, breathlessness, sweating, dizziness and high heartbeat rate. Mental symptoms of stress may include memory loss, loss in ability in decision making, confusions, panic attacks. Through behavior patterns symptom of stress can also identified as nail biting, change in appetite (either too little or too much), increase in smoking, drinking and taking drugs. Person suffering from stress may also show some symptoms of emotional misbalance such as impatience, outbursts of anger, bawling, depression and major, decline in the appearance of the individual.

There could be many reasons that may work as the causes of stress for the individual. Generally, the situations and events that cause stress for the individual are

stressors. These stressors could be the external or internal. External stressors includes: physical environment, interaction in the social group, work place commitments, major event related to life and annoyances related to the daily life. Physical environment stressors are related to the sounds (noise), light (bright or dull), heat (high or low temperature) and space (confined). These stressors create uneasiness and stressful environment on the basis of physical environment factors. Interaction in the social group is another major factor of stress among the people. Rudeness in dealing or interaction, dominant and aggressive nature may develop the stressful situations from which many a times people struggle to cope from them. Major changes in life such as death, birth, lost job and even promotion in job can act as the stressors that are exerted and controlled by external factors. Daily annoyances may also work as external stressors. This may include day to day life related problems. On the other hand, internal stressors include life style choices, negative self-talk, mind traps and personality traits. The pattern of one's lifestyle such as improper sleep pattern and inappropriate work schedule may lead to the stressful situation for the person. Negative self-talk can also be the reason for stress which is controlled by the person internally. One's thinking about herself/himself may cause stress. The person who is thinking the worse and expect worse will happen, will lead to the stress. Overthinking and criticizing the self are also the internal stressors. Rigid thinking and unrealistic expectation from the world are also the reasons of the stress.

## WORKPLACE STRESS:

Stress can be occur due to many reasons and unpleasant conditions or situations at workplace may lead to the stress at work. This is also known as occupational stress. There could be many factors that may lead to the workplace stress for the workers. If the workplace stress continuous for a long time, out of control of employees and they are unable to cope with it, then it will start to affect the health and performance of the employees. Generally the nasty work environment, load of the work, pressure to meet deadlines and overtime are the responsive factors for the stress at work. Poor working conditions, high demands in job, misbehavior of students, parents and other staff members, lack of job security, innovations in teaching and learning process insufficient resources for work and pressure to complete the work within the specified time are the common stressors in teaching profession.

Many a times people believe that teaching is an easy job with low work pressure, less working hours and with many holidays and vacations. But many researches prove it wrong. Teaching is a very complex profession in which teachers have to work with complex situations which can be filled with workload, conflicts and stress. The work pressure can be perceived as positive until it keep the employee motivated to work and learn. But when it becomes excessive and unmanageable, it leads to the stress. Stress at work can damage the health and work performance.

## THEORIES RELATED TO WORKPLACE STRESS:

Workplace stress can be better understood through the following theoretical background:

### A) Person- Environment fit theory:

This theory explains that there should be a match between the person and the environment in which they work. This theory assumes that every person is compatible to work in some specific work environment and it will give best results, in terms of less stress and high performance, when there is a compatibility between the person and his work environment. This compatibility is affected by person related factors such as his/her interest, ability, knowl-

edge, skills, preferences, values, goals and personality traits. On the other hand, some environmental factors such as demands of the job, organization culture, values and job profile may also affect this compatibility. Thus, a person may experience workplace stress if there is a misfit between the person's characteristics and the environment they work. This person environment relationship can be divided into four types such as:

- a) **Person-Vocation Fit:** There should be match between person's interest, ability and knowledge with the demands of vocation. For example a person has an interest in teaching and working with students and people can be compatible match for teaching profession.
- b) **Person-Job Fit:** This is a fit or match between the person and the demands of the particular job. There should be a match of knowledge, skills, values and abilities required in a job with the interest, abilities and preferences of the person. For example: If the person has a good attitude and aptitude towards teaching but not able to work with small children, then can opt teaching in higher education sector or may do some research work in education field.
- c) **Person-Organization Fit:** This is a match between the person's individual values and the values and commitments of the organization demands.
- d) **Person-Group Fit:** This match is also much required for the good compatibility of person with the work environment. This includes the match between person's values and beliefs with the co-workers. There should be a good compatible status between the members of the group of workers working for the organization.

#### B) Job Demand-Control (Support) Theory:

This theory is very popular in the field of research especially for workplace stress. Under this theory, it is believed that job control, job demand and social support in the workplace are the dimensions that can either improve the performance or can lead to the workplace stress. Job control refers to the range of experiences through which employees can influence the tasks. Job demand refers to the specific demands of the job related to the work pressure and the conflicts in the duties and roles to be accomplished. On the other hand, social support refers to the support of the colleagues, supervisors and the management at the workplace.

High job demand along with high support from the colleague, supervisors and management can motivate the employees to do the job or assigned work actively and enthusiastically. Whereas, low job demand with low control over the work makes the employees passive at their work. When there is high demand at job but with low control leads to the high strain job and develop stressful situations for the employees. On the other hand, combination of low job demand and high control makes the working environment of low stress and strain.

#### STRESS ON TEACHERS:

Many people think that teaching is an easy task. This is a profession which has many holidays, vacations and very less workload. But this notion is completely wrong. Now a days, teaching has become a challenging profession. This is a profession which require an active involvement of teachers from planning a lesson to its implementation, getting feedback for evaluation. In India, teachers do many non-academic tasks along with academic works. There are many responsibilities that a teacher perform under academic responsibilities. Teachers are require to do planning of lesson before teaching, developing and organizing teaching learning process in the class so that students achieve predetermined aims and objectives. Along with planning and organizing teaching learning process, the teachers are also require to do formative and summative assessment of leaning in the classroom. After assessment, the teacher needs to plan for the next day. Innovations and searching for new teaching methods which are best suited to the specific needs of his/her class is also one of the major responsibility of a teacher. Setting up classroom rules and code of conduct for students for the better classroom management are also comes under the responsibilities of a teacher. Apart from all these, teachers are require to grow professionally. Doing action researches and participating in seminars, workshops and conferences are also important for the teachers. Along with all these academic responsibilities, teachers are also require to make records of all these tasks performed by him/her in the class such as maintaining attendance, progress, and achievements records and recording the problems faced in the execution of various tasks and measures adopted to overcome them are also recorded by the teacher. This creates a load of record keeping or paper work on the teachers.

Other than these academic responsibilities, schools many a times (generally government schools) exert nonacademic responsibilities on teachers such as census duty, election duty (on election and counting days), pulse polio work and even ration card verification work to the teachers. Even private schools also pressurize the teachers to do multitasking like performing clerical work of collecting fees from students and assigning school bus duties. This undue pressure on teachers of workload, deadlines with nasty work conditions and lack of job security makes teaching a stressful profession.

#### STRATEGIES FOR COPING WITH STRESS:

The following are some strategies that a teacher can opt for reducing the stress:

- a) One should avoid unnecessary stress. It is true that we can't avoid all stress but one need to set some achievable goals and targets in order to reduce last moment rush to achieve deadlines.
- b) By maintaining assertive behavior towards stress as facing stressful situation with confidence is much required when we are in such situation that we can't avoid that situation.
- c) For coping with stress, teacher need to work out priorities. Make a list of list to do and tick off the completed work. This can help the teacher to do important tasks first.
- d) Identify the stressful situation and prepare an action plan beforehand.
- e) Another technique could be that we could adapt ourselves as per the situations that create stress.
- f) Relaxation activities such as meditation, yoga and deep breathing activates the relaxation mechanisms in our body. During the stressful situation one needs to do relaxation activity to set the body in rest state.
- g) During exercise daily can also work as one of the technique to reduce stress.
- h) Good eating habits leads to the nourished body which is good at fighting against stress.
- i) One should avoid reacting on imagined results. Before reacting to the stressful situations one always need to analyze the various aspects of situation.
- j) One should always learn from past mistakes and try not to repeat it in future.
- k) Positive thinking is always the key to reduce stress. Even in stressful situation, one should never leave to deal with the stressors positively.
- l) Talking with colleagues and management about the stress and problems faced can help to reduce stress. As discussing with others about the problems may help in finding solutions of it.

#### CONCLUSION:

Stress at workplace in teaching profession is due to the undue work pressure on teachers, race to meet deadlines and non-supportive work place environment. This stress when last for long duration can give adverse effects on teachers' performance and health. For reducing stress teachers must be fitted to the teaching environment- fit to the vocation and job demands, fit to the organizational and group values. If there is a mismatch between any one of these, will lead to the physical and psychological burden on teachers and finally impact the performance and achievements of learners. For managing stress teachers need to work positively and even principals should lead the staff with faith in them and provide autonomy to create innovations in teaching learning process. Time to time workshops and wellness programmes can also be organized by the management of school.

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